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WEST AND HIS TEACHING

THE portrait of Robert Fulton by West, which hangs in the place of honor in the American Section of the present Hudson-Fulton Exhibition, shows the inventor in the years after the successful venture of the *Clermont*. It was no doubt a pleasure to the President of the Royal Academy to paint his former pupil, now become famous—though in an entirely different sphere from what he might have anticipated—and he has attested his own interest in the new invention by the glimpse of the steamboat seen through the window to the right of the sitter.

The success which crowned his efforts in the direction of invention has somewhat obscured Fulton's endeavors as a painter—the years of his study and work—and it is well that the present celebration should have given occasion for the remembrance of this interesting phase of his career. Some idea of his efforts may be gained from the valuable bibliography of his works contributed to the second volume of the Exhibition catalogue by his great-granddaughter, Mrs. Alice Cray Sutcliffe.

Fulton's similarity in this phase of his career to that other American inventor, Samuel Finley Breese Morse, is worth recalling here. Both studied in London with West, both returned to this country with high hopes for their careers as painters, and both gained their highest recognition as men of invention.

Hanging beside Fulton's portrait by the President of the Royal Academy are two portraits of his friend, Joel Barlow, the distinguished politician, diplomatist, and writer, painted by him, and nearby is a fine portrait of Jeremiah Evarts, by Morse. In view of the relationship which all of these men bore to one another, and of their vital interest in art, it may be of interest to quote the following letter of West, addressed to John R. Murray, a merchant of New York, one of the founders of the American Academy of Arts, our earliest institution of this sort, and an Honorary Member of the National Academy of Design which succeeded it. It contains advice to

the American people on the cultivation of the arts, and is an official utterance whose delivery was undoubtedly received with respect at the time it was written and which may, even now, more than one hundred years later, be referred to as the words of counsel from one who acted upon the beliefs that he cherished. The letter, which was presented to the Museum Library by Mr. John Crimmins in 1908, reads as follows:

LONDON, NEWMAN STREET,
16th April, 1804.

DEAR SIR:

Our friend Mr. Trumbull returning to America, I embrace the opportunity to thank you for your polite and obliging letter to me on the subject of your Academy of the Fine Arts at New York. It is an Institution which reflects great honor on its promoters, and I think has laid the foundation of the Fine Arts in the Western World; on the subject of those Arts permit me to offer you and my countrymen a few observations, which may not be unacceptable at the present moment.

The perfection of the fine Arts has been considered by civilized Nations as well as by Individuals, both in the ancient, and modern world, not only the Criterion of Civilization, but the means of securing to them a Refinement in Morals, and a Certainty of Immortality; The Greeks gave the brightest Example in the ancient World, and that the Romans followed their example is a Truth not to be denied;—The Italians pursued the same System;—The illustrious House of Medicis, who showed their rising Greatness, and the Papal influence becoming in the fifteenth, and sixteenth Centuries, the Zenith of their Excellence, have verified what I have advanced, and with the Greeks have secured to themselves an Immortality, never to be effaced, as long as the human Mind continues to be cultivated. France, Germany, Flanders and Holland have been equally solicitous to raise and preserve them, and have shared in their Glory; but of all the Moderns, England has given the brightest Example in her Cultivation, as well as utility, of them as connected, not only with what I have advanced, but as

giving new Energies in Manufactures, and Commerce, as well, as being one of the Means of the Elevation she so proudly holds in the Scale of Nations. The Establishment of The Royal Academy in London has given to this City, and to the Country, a Refinement in Taste that can render Life more agreeable, and Society more delightful, than that which our Forefathers experienced:

The Art of delineating Nature, and of rendering the Imagination visible by the Production of the Pencil has ever obtained a distinguished Rank among human Inventions;—Those Nations which have encouraged and cultivated it, as a matter of Taste, and Ornament only, have deprived it of one of its greatest Excellencies, that of Usefulness. Among the numerous and splendid Perfections to which the British Arts and Manufactures are now carried, there are few, perhaps none, but owe a Portion of their Excellence and Patronage to the Pencil, for it is by first transferring the Images of the Mind to the

Eye by the Aid of the Pencil, that the Hand of the Workman is instructed to execute: Impressed with these Ideas, I have had a Pride in cherishing the art of Delineation as the most powerful Means of Instruction, and on this Hand, I feel a Satisfaction that America has made a Beginning in cultivating the Art of Delineation, and Taste among her Inhabitants;—

It is on the foregoing Observations I wish America to fix her attention in cultivating the fine Arts—It is the great End for which they have been cultivated by all wise Nations, and it is the End for which America must also cultivate them. I shall take the first opportunity of securing for you (agreeable to yr. Request) a fine cast of the anatomical Figure in the Royal Academy, and with this, I send you the Abstract of the Laws and Regulations of that Institution.

With Friendship and Esteem, I have the Honor

To be Dr. Sir Yr. Obliged Humble Serv't
BENJ^N WEST.

